



March 4, 1997

Superfund Fact Sheet

Commencement Bay Nearshore/Tideflats Tacoma, Washington

EPA Invites Your Comments

*The U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is proposing to modify the cleanup level for polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Commencement Bay sediments, and we would like your comments on this proposal. **You are encouraged to send us your comments from March 10 through April 9, 1997.***

Please send your written comments to:

Allison Hiltner, EPA Project Manager
1200 Sixth Avenue, MS/ECL-116
Seattle, Washington 98101
or call her at (206) 553-2140 or (800) 424-4EPA

EPA's reevaluation of PCB cleanup levels, and rationale for the proposed modification, is documented in a DRAFT report called an "Explanation of Significant Difference". In addition to sending us your written comments we invite you to attend a public meeting to discuss this issue.

Please Join Us for a Public Meeting:

Wednesday, March 26, 1997
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
at the
World Trade Center
3600 Port of Tacoma Road, Tacoma, Washington

Why Change the Cleanup Number?

Over the last several months, EPA has reevaluated the Commencement Bay cleanup level using current sediment chemistry data and current information on the risks of PCBs to human health and wildlife. This reevaluation was undertaken for the following reasons:

- several parties requested that EPA undertake this reevaluation;
- current estimates of the volume and costs required to cleanup PCB-contaminated sediments are significantly higher than EPA's original estimates; and
- EPA has updated its assumptions and methods for estimating risks to human health and the environment due to PCBs since the site-wide cleanup plan (Record of Decision or ROD) was written in 1989.

What Change is EPA Recommending?

EPA is recommending modifying the PCB cleanup action level from the original ROD standard of 150 parts per billion (ppb) (to be met within 10 years after cleanup) to 450 ppb (to be met immediately after cleanup). This recommendation is based on EPA's reevaluation of risks associated with PCBs, and the nine remedy selection criteria, described below.

This means that EPA is proposing to require dredging or capping in areas of Commencement Bay that have levels of PCBs in sediments at 450 ppb or higher.

Sediments with PCB concentrations below 450 ppb would be left in place to recover naturally over time.

How Did EPA Arrive at this Recommendation?

EPA evaluated potential cleanup levels from 50 ppb to 900 ppb, and found that 450 ppb is protective of human health and the environment, and achieves the best balance of EPA's nine evaluation criteria.

EPA's research shows that a 450 ppb action level for dredging or capping will result in a post-cleanup, waterway-wide average of less than 150 ppb PCBs for the Hylebos and Thea Foss Waterways, and for Commencement Bay as a whole. While the original ROD required 150 ppb to be met throughout the waterways, rather than as an average, it also did not require this goal to be met until ten years after cleanup. The goal of 450 ppb would be achieved immediately after cleanup.

A change to the PCB cleanup level would have a significant effect only on the Hylebos Waterway cleanup, therefore EPA's analysis focuses mainly on the Hylebos.

The human health risk evaluation showed that all of the potential cleanup levels evaluated, from 50 ppb PCBs to 900 ppb PCBs, would be protective of public health. The ecological evaluation also showed that

Evaluating the Numbers

*EPA is required to evaluate cleanup alternatives (such as the proposed 450 ppb cleanup level) against the following **nine remedy selection criteria**:*

- 1) Overall protection of human health and the environment
- 2) Compliance with applicable, or relevant and appropriate, regulations
- 3) Long-term effectiveness and permanence
- 4) Reduction of toxicity, mobility and volume through treatment
- 5) Short-term effectiveness
- 6) Implementability
- 7) Cost
- 8) State and Tribal acceptance
- 9) Community acceptance

a PCB cleanup level of 450 ppb to be protective of wildlife. Since the risk evaluation shows that the range of potential cleanup levels evaluated would meet the first criteria and protect human health and the environment, the other criteria must be considered in selecting the most appropriate cleanup standard for Commencement Bay.

Of the remaining criteria, long-term effectiveness, reduction of toxicity, short-term effectiveness, and implementability would be somewhat, but not substantially changed by the modified cleanup level. The cost, however, would change considerably.

The 1989 cleanup plan (ROD) estimated a cost of \$13,850,000 for cleanup of Hylebos Waterway sediments using confined aquatic disposal, and that cost would be higher for upland disposal and lower for other disposal options. The estimated cost to achieve the 150 ppb PCB cleanup level in 10 years has increased by about 100%

since the ROD was written. The cost to achieve the 450 ppb PCB cleanup level is still higher than the initial cost, but it is significantly lower than the 100% increase. EPA estimates the cost to clean up to 450 ppb PCBs at \$18 million for the Hylebos Waterway. Based on this analysis, EPA has determined that a PCB cleanup level of 450 ppb is the most cost-effective alternative.

The State has indicated a general agreement with EPA's proposed modification to the PCB cleanup level. EPA will use comments received during the comment period to further evaluate State and Tribal acceptance. Based on information EPA has received to date, it appears that community acceptance is varied on this issue. Some members believe the cleanup level should be raised, while others believe it should remain as stated in the ROD. EPA will also further evaluate community acceptance after the public comment period.

In summary:, EPA is recommending 450 ppb PCBs as the cleanup action level for Commencement Bay for the following reasons. It is within the EPA's acceptable risk range for Superfund cleanups and is protective of human health and the environment; and a 450 ppb cleanup level appears to provide the best balance of the evaluation criteria.

For More Information

If you would like to review the draft Explanation of Significant Difference, the document is available in the information repositories listed below.

Tacoma Main Public Library*

1102 Tacoma Avenue South
Northwest Room
Tacoma, WA
phone: 591-5622
hours: M-Th, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.
Fri-Sat, 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

Citizens for a Healthy Bay

771 Broadway
Tacoma, WA
phone: 383-2429
hours: M-Fri, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
or by appointment

Environmental Protection Agency*

1200 Sixth Avenue
7th Floor Records Center
Seattle, WA
phone: (206) 553-4494
hours: M-Fri 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

*EPA has placed its Administrative Record of documents we relied upon to make our decision to modify the PCB cleanup level at these locations.

Questions?

If you have any questions, would like more information, or would like a copy of the Draft Explanation of Significant Difference, please feel free to contact one of the following EPA representatives toll free in Seattle at **1-800-424-4372**, or as indicated below:

Allison Hiltner, Project Manager
(206) 553-2140

Jeanne O'Dell, Community Relations Coordinator
(206) 553-6919

For those with impaired hearing or speech, please contact EPA's telecommunication device for the hearing impaired (TDD) at (206) 553-1698. To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting one of the numbers listed above.